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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0106
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0643
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 0027
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0074
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0011
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 0034
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 0349
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000178

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S ECONOMIC PRISONERS MOVED TO
"BETTER" PRISON - POSSIBLE AMNESTY ON FEBRUARY 19

REF: ASHGABAT 140

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.
4 (B) and (D).

Summary

11. (C) According to a local embassy employee, whose brother was among them, 15 high-profile prisoners accused of economic crimes have been moved from the notorious Owadandep Prison to the more humane Bayramagly prison outside of Mary City. Among those moved were former Minister of Water Management Gurban Welmyradov, former Ashgabat and Turkmenbashi Mayor Cerkezov, former Maritime Post Administration Chief Gurbanmyradov (Oil and Gas Deputy Chairman Yolly Gurbanmyradov's younger brother), and former State Oil and Gas Concern Chief Iljaz Chariyev (who had been jailed at the same time as the Gurbanmyradov brothers). According to this source former Presidential Aparat Chief Rejep Saparov died at Owadandep prison five months after he was imprisoned in 12005. This source also said the prisoners believed some or all of them would be amnestied on the occasion of the February 19 Flag Day holiday. Those associated with the 2002 assassination attempt on Niyazov were not among those moved and apparently are being kept in a separate structure of Owadandep Prison. Though many, if not all, of the economic prisoners were likely guilty of the crimes with which they were charged, e.g., corruption, embezzlement and taking bribes, their arrests were largely believed to be politically motivated. End Summary.

Prisoners Moved

12. (C) A local embassy employee called his American supervisor late in the evening of February 7 in an agitated

state saying he was being given permission to see his brother, a former Minister of Water Management, who had been held incommunicado in Owadandepo Prison since 2004. On February 9, the overjoyed employee told Charge he had seen his brother, that his brother was in remarkably good shape, considering, and that he anticipated the family obtaining regular visiting rights.

¶3. (C) According to the employee, he received news "through the grapevine," that his brother was moved, and was led to understand that, through a bribe, he would be granted permission to see his brother. Once the employee arrived at Bayramagly Prison on February 8, the place was a "madhouse," with people meeting with their long-lost family members for the first time in years. Indeed the employee had frequently told Charge over the years that he had no idea if his brother were dead or alive. The employee said his brother and the other prisoners looked remarkably good given the length of their internment and lack of family contact. (Note: Families are the chief source of food, medicine and money for normal prisoners, End Note.) He attributed the prisoners' relative well-being to the appointment of a new prison warden at Owadandepo a year and a half ago who dramatically improved the prisoners' well-fare.

¶4. (C) The employee's brother said that the prisoners had been loaded into private sedans, in groups of four, at night and taken at night to Bayramagly on January 30, where they were held in quarantine until February 7, at which time, somehow they were able to notify their families they could receive visitors.

Saparov Dead

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¶5. (C) According to the employee's brother, former Presidential Administration Head (and former Niyazov succession front-runner) Rejep Saparov died in Owadandepo five months after he arrived in Owadandepo in July 2005.

Others

¶6. (C) The brother said that included in the 15 prisoners were former Water Management Minister Gurban Welmyradov, former Mayor of Ashgabat and Turkmenbashi Cerkezov, former Maritime Port Administration Chief Gurbanmyradov (brother of former Deputy Chairman of Oil and Gas Yolly Gurbanmyradov) and former State Oil and Gas Concern Chief Iljaz Chariyev. The brother said everyone had heard that Yolly Gurbanmyradov himself was now under house arrest. The brother also thought it possible that those taken to Bayramagly might amnestied during the February 19 Flag Day holiday.

Economic Prisoners Held Separately

¶7. (C) According to the brother, those accused of economic crimes were held separately -- in a different facility two kilometers away --, from those accused of "terrorism," i.e., those held in connection with the 2002 assassination attempt against President Niyazov. The brother, therefore, had no information on the conditions of those prisoners, including former Foreign Minister Borys Shykmyradov.

Comment

¶8. (C) As reported reftel, observers here believe probable new president Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov is weak on energy issues, the engine that drives Turkmenistan's economy. Releasing Yolly Gurbanmyradov would provide him the expertise he needs to deal with the international business community. Foreign Minister Meredov alluded to this during a February 7

meeting with Charge wherein he invited SCA/CEN PDAS Mann to visit the first week of March to discuss energy issues. In response to Charge's question regarding whether the new government would be ready to discuss energy at that time, Meredov said, "there will be a new cabinet by then and everything will be normal."

19. (C) Eventual amnesty of the other prisoners may speak more to Berdimuhammedov's methodical efforts to court public opinion. Though arguably every public official is corrupt by virtue of the bribery-based economy, Niyazov used charges of corruption to remove those who had fallen out of his favor. Releasing these prisoners would likely be a popular move. End Comment.
BRUSH